

**Lincolnshire, IL** - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk introduced eight newly-elected Members of Parliament and Parliamentary staff from Afghanistan during a government/civics class at Stevenson High School. Students asked questions and heard first hand accounts of life under the Taliban from the Afghan delegation.

Students spoke with Ms. Zahra Sahak who serves as staff on the Legislation Committee, drafting legislative language for the Afghanistan Parliament. Ms. Sahak was 15 years old when the Taliban regime was dismantled. Had the Taliban remained in power, she would not have been allowed to pursue her education or hold a position in the government. Instead, Ms. Sahak is a graduate of Kabul University, previously working as a research assistant and project manager for Non-Government Organization's (NGO's).

In 1996, the Taliban dictatorship banned all girls from school in Afghanistan as part of a policy to keep women uneducated, dependent and in the home. With the 2001 election of President Karzai and parliament, Afghanistan saw its first functioning democratic assembly since the Soviet invasion of 1979. With the end of the Taliban dictatorship Afghan schools once again were opened to girls and young women,

Last December, Congressman Kirk visited the Miriam High School for girls located in the capital city Kabul to deliver school supplies and Stevenson High School t-shirts. Since 2001, the high school has taught more than 7,000 girls, most of whom and not been in class for five years due to Taliban restrictions.

"This was a great opportunity for the Afghan leaders to meet American students and see our schools in action" Congressman Kirk said. "At the same time, I think hearing stories of life under dictatorship has given these young Americans an even greater appreciation for their rights and freedoms.

The Afghan delegation is visiting the 10<sup>th</sup> Congressional district August 31-September 3 to meet with local and state government officials. They will also see the following:

1. The Kenilworth village board – to see how a local government works,

2. The Lake County board – to see how a larger unit of government works,
3. A Congressional hearing on food allergies in children, to see constituents raising a new issue with their representative in Congress,
4. The Great Lakes Naval Training Center – to see the largest naval training facility in the world, and
5. The Bahai temple – a beautiful structure and symbol of religious tolerance located in Wilmette.

The delegation will conclude their two week trip to the United States with a week long stay in Washington to meet with Members of Congress and their staff, as part of the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC) program. Congressman Kirk is an original cosponsor of the legislation that founded the Commission and serves as a Commission member.

Contact: Eric Elk  
847-940-0202